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Joint Education Committee Hosts Local Robotics Team

(Lansing) – The Senate and House Education Committees held a joint committee meeting Thursday, June 5, to hear a presentation from the General Motors Proving Ground & Huron Valley Schools FIRST Robotics Team, entitled “Inspiring Youth Through FIRST Robotics.” FIRST stands for “For Inspiration and Recognition in Science and Technology.”

The local robotics team was in town to show the committee how the program has been successful at developing a skilled workforce in a growing technological society, helping to keep talented people in Michigan.

“After participating in the robotics public/private program, some young participants who are losing academic investment become motivated and energized to remain in school,” said state Sen. Nancy Cassis (R-Novi). Sen. Cassis, who is Vice-chair of the Senate Education Committee and whose district encompasses Huron Valley, initiated the meeting between the robotics team and the committees.

Two students who spoke before the committee, Gina Sweet of Milford and Dominique Lee of West Bloomfield, both testified that they were previously uninterested in technology, but their participation inspired them to pursue college and a career in Michigan’s growing high-tech industry.

“Every student who comes into this program has increased their grade point. Every one of them,” Robotics FIRST Regional Director Ian McEwan told the legislators during the presentation.

FIRST was founded by Dean Kamen, an inventor and entrepreneur, to increase student interest in mathematics, science and technology. FIRST brings together industry leaders, high school

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teachers, and students to further technological pursuits. Students are put through an intense six-week robotics project where they learn skills such as cooperation, discipline, and teamwork while creating a robot to compete with other teams across the United States. Currently, there are more than 100 teams in Michigan.

FIRST's mission is to design accessible, innovative programs to build self-confidence, knowledge, and life skills while motivating young people to pursue opportunities in science, technology and engineering. The organization has inspired many students to stay in school when they would have otherwise dropped out. Some will pursue technical training, community college, or universities to further their career opportunities.

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Editor's Note: A downloadable photograph of Senator Cassis with the Robotics FIRST Team is available on the Senate Majority Photowire at:

<http://www.senate.michigan.gov/gop/photowire/Cassis/RobotTeamcolor.htm>